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NEWS RELEASE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
ON FEBRUARY 21, 2013**

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Operators of Idaho Aquarium Arrested for Wildlife Violations

Florida Indictment Alleges Two Illegally Purchased Marine Life

BOISE – Ammon Covino, 39, of Meridian, Idaho, and Christopher Conk, 40, of Middleton, Idaho, were arrested today for violations of the Lacey Act, U.S. Attorney Wendy J. Olson announced. A federal grand jury in the Southern District of Florida returned a sealed indictment on November 8, 2012, charging the defendants with conspiracy to violate the Lacey Act and violating the Lacey Act by purchasing Florida protected marine life in interstate commerce.

The four count indictment, which was unsealed today, alleges that Covino and Conk purchased four spotted eagle rays (*Aeobatus nairnari*) and two lemon sharks (*Negaprion brevirostris*) for approximately \$6,300. The marine wildlife were allegedly harvested illegally and without a permit.

Covino and Conk appeared this afternoon before Chief U.S. Magistrate Judge Candy W. Dale at the federal courthouse in Boise. The court ordered the defendants to appear on March 15, 2013, before U.S. Magistrate Judge Lurana S. Snow, at the Sidney M. Aronovitz Federal Courthouse in Key West, Florida.

The defendants are each charged with one count of Conspiracy and three counts of Illegal Purchase and Sale of Fish/Wildlife. Each count is punishable by up to five years in prison, a maximum fine of \$250,000, and at least three years of supervised release. The indictment also includes a forfeiture count.

The case is being investigated by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFW), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and Idaho Department of Fish and Game.

An indictment is only an allegation of criminal conduct and is not evidence of guilt. A person is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

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